

But the second point I want to make is that he did it, in no small measure, because of the spirit you see reflected in the set of the jaw and the glance of the eyes in this fine portrait. He basically believed there was no mountain that couldn't be climbed. He believed that American businesses had a responsibility to act in their enlightened self-interest to help themselves and others, here at home and around the world.

He also believed that people driven by ancient hatreds could find a way to put them aside. I will never forget how excited he was in the last conversation we had right before he left for Bosnia, how proud he was that he could lead a delegation of American business people to the Balkans to try to make peace.

Well, the peace process is working in Bosnia. As all of you know, it's under siege again in the Balkans because of what is going on in Kosovo. I don't want to talk about that here today except to say that there are basically two kinds of people that are dominating the public discourse around the world today: There are people that are determined to divide and drive wedges between and depress people because they're of different ethnic and racial and religious groups; and then there are people like Ron Brown, who believe that everybody ought to be lifted up and brought together and don't understand why anyone would waste lives and take other people's lives to gain a false sense of power in a smaller and smaller life based on oppression.

And when you look at this picture today, when you go out, first of all, I want all the members of the Commerce Department to be proud of what you are doing, proud of what he did, and proud of what you are doing under Secretary Daley, who has also, in my judgment, done a magnificent job. And I want you to think about the troubles of the world today, and I want you to see your life as an instrument of bringing out the spirit that Ron Brown brought to his life and his work in this Department every day and think about it for what it is, the principal opposing force to all this destructive racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural destruction we see all over the world today.

Every country has to make that choice, and in a way, every business has to make that choice and every person has to make that choice.

We're all blessed that we knew Ron Brown. We're glad that his family is here today. We're glad we've got Alma right where we want her; she can't talk back. I could have given her a whole lecture today. *[Laughter]* But I know Ron Brown would want me to say, to use this moment to say, "Look at this picture. Look at this life. Look at the troubles of the world." The choice is clear: America needs to stay on the path that he blazed.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:49 a.m. in the Herbert Hoover Building Auditorium at the Department of Commerce. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC; former Trade Ambassador Mickey Kantor and his wife, Heidi; artist Steven Polson, who painted the official portrait; and Alma Brown, widow of Ron Brown.

### **Remarks Announcing Airstrikes Against Serbian Targets in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)**

*March 24, 1999*

Good afternoon. United States forces, acting with our NATO allies, have commenced airstrikes against Serbian military targets in the former Yugoslavia. I will address the Nation more fully tonight on why this action is necessary, but I wanted to say a few words now.

We and our NATO allies have taken this action only after extensive and repeated efforts to obtain a peaceful solution to the crisis in Kosovo. But President Milosevic, who over the past decade started the terrible wars against Croatia and Bosnia, has again chosen aggression over peace. He has violated the commitments he, himself, made last fall to stop the brutal repression in Kosovo. He has rejected the balanced and fair peace accords that our allies and partners, including Russia, proposed last month, a peace agreement that Kosovo's ethnic Albanians courageously accepted.

Instead, his forces have intensified their attacks, burning down Kosovar Albanian villages and murdering civilians. As I speak, more Serb forces are moving into Kosovo, and more people are fleeing their homes—60,000 in just the last 5 weeks, a quarter of a million altogether. Many have headed toward neighboring countries.

Kosovo's crisis now is full-blown, and if we do not act, clearly, it will get even worse. Only firmness now can prevent greater catastrophe later.

Our strikes have three objectives: First, to demonstrate the seriousness of NATO's opposition to aggression and its support for peace; second, to deter President Milosevic from continuing and escalating his attacks on helpless civilians by imposing a price for those attacks; and third, if necessary, to damage Serbia's capacity to wage war against Kosovo in the future by seriously diminishing its military capabilities.

As I have repeatedly said to the American people, this action is not risk-free. It carries risks. And I ask for the prayers of all Americans for our men and women in uniform in the area. However, I have concluded that the dangers of acting now are clearly outweighed by the risks of failing to act, the risks that many more innocent people will die or be driven from their homes by the tens of thousands, the risks that the conflict will involve and destabilize neighboring nations. It will clearly be much more costly and dangerous to stop later than this effort to prevent it from going further now.

At the end of the 20th century, after two World Wars and a cold war, we and our allies have a chance to leave our children a Europe that is free, peaceful, and stable. But we must—we must—act now to do that, because if the Balkans once again become a place of brutal killing and massive refugee flights, it will be impossible to achieve.

With our allies, we used diplomacy and force to end the war in Bosnia. Now trouble next door in Kosovo puts the region's people at risk again. Our NATO allies unanimously support this action. The United States must stand with them and stand against ethnic violence and atrocity.

Our alliance is united. And I am particularly grateful for the support we have received from Members of Congress from both parties. As we go forward, I will remain in close contact with Congress—I have spoken with all the leaders today—and in contact with our friends and allies around the world. And I will have more to say about all of this tonight.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:15 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro).

### **Statement on the Tenth Anniversary of the *Exxon Valdez* Oilspill in Prince William Sound, Alaska**

*March 24, 1999*

Ten years after the *Exxon Valdez* ran aground in Prince William Sound, the lingering effects of the worst oilspill in U.S. history are a compelling reminder that we must be ever vigilant in the protection of America's natural treasures.

The spill caused grievous damage to an extraordinary web of nature and to the communities and livelihoods it sustains. A decade later, the healing is well under way, and tough new rules ensure that our entire coast is better protected against the threat of oilspills. With the State of Alaska, we have converted the large penalty paid by Exxon into lasting protection for salmon streams, fragile coastline, and old-growth forest around Prince William Sound.

Still, more time must pass before the communities and wildlife of Prince William Sound can fully recover. And some of the damage may never be undone. This awful disaster was a wake-up call. And we must work to ensure that its true legacy is a renewed commitment to protect our environment for generations yet to come.